

Independent Claims 21, 25, 31 and 35

As defined by independent Claims 21, 25, 31 and 35, the invention generally concerns copying and printing of images in which an image forming apparatus has an image masking control for performing masking so as to provide a sheet-edge margin. As described in a prior response, conventional apparatuses often include a problem of "back staining" in which toner is adhered to an overwritten portion of a photosensitive drum, which thereafter transfers the toner to a transfer roller that is thereby contaminated. The present invention addresses this shortcoming by allowing for variable control of a size of a masking area of a sheet-edge margin, in which control is based at least in part on a selected mode of the recording unit.

In entering the rejection over Abe, the Office Action took the position that Abe disclosed a control unit adapted to variably control a size of a masking area of a sheet-edge margin, based at least in part on a selected mode of a recording unit. A citation was made to lines 41 to 49 at Abe's column 26. For their part, Applicants respectfully disagree with this characterization of Abe.

The cited portions of Abe describe the relationship between a sheet A and its printing area B, and explain that the printing area is defined by four mask areas, namely, leading, trailing, left and right margin mask areas a, b, c and d, respectively. See Figure 34-2. Abe additionally discloses that mask timing differs according to an image recording density, an image forming speed, or the like.

In Applicants' view, however, Abe changes his mask timing not for the purpose of changing the size of the mask area. For example, in Abe, when an image

forming speed changes, the timing for the mask must also be changed since otherwise there would be a change in the mask area. Accordingly, in Applicants' view, Abe changes his mask timing so that the size of the mask area is constant.

Accordingly, since Abe maintains his mask areas as a constant value, it is not possible for it to disclose a control unit adapted to variably control a size of a masking area of a sheet-edge margin, much less to show control over the size of the masking area based at least in part on a selected mode of a recording unit.

A rejection under § 102 is sustainable only if there is a strict word-for-word identity between the invention and a single prior art reference, in which the reference must show with word-for-word identity each and every element of the invention, with all of those elements arranged exactly as in the claim. See MPEP § 2131 and cases cited therein.

Here, Abe simply does not show variable control over a size of a masking area of a sheet-edge margin, and it simply does not show variable control over the size based at least in part on a selected mode of a recording unit. It is therefore respectfully submitted that the § 102(b) rejection over Abe is not sustainable, and must be withdrawn.

#### Independent Claims 41 and 45

One of the ways in which independent Claims 41 and 45 differ from the other independent claims is that these claims recite scanning of plural lasers.

Abe, on the other hand, does not disclose scanning of plural lasers. The Office Action cited to Figure 10 of Abe, referring to reference numeral 109. This citation

is not understood. Reference numeral 109 refers to a singular "laser" and not to plural "lasers".

For this reason alone, the §102(b) rejection over Abe should be withdrawn.

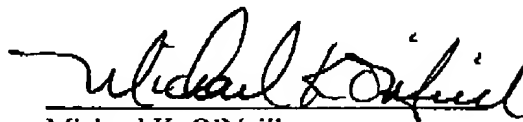
Moreover, it is not seen how any rejection over Abe could be sustained with respect to independent Claims 41 and 45. These claims recite generation of plural masking signals, each to control light emission of a corresponding one of the plural lasers, wherein the plural masking signals are generated at mutually independent timings. Since Abe shows only a single laser, it is incomprehensible that it might disclose generation of plural masking signals, much less generation of plural masking signals at mutually independent timings.

As a result, Applicants believe that withdrawal of the § 102(b) rejection over Abe is warranted, and such action is respectfully requested.

CONCLUSION

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Costa Mesa, California office by telephone at (714) 540-8700. All correspondence should be directed to our address given below.

Respectfully submitted,



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